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## Senior Reflections

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# Senior Reflections

By T.J. Mathis

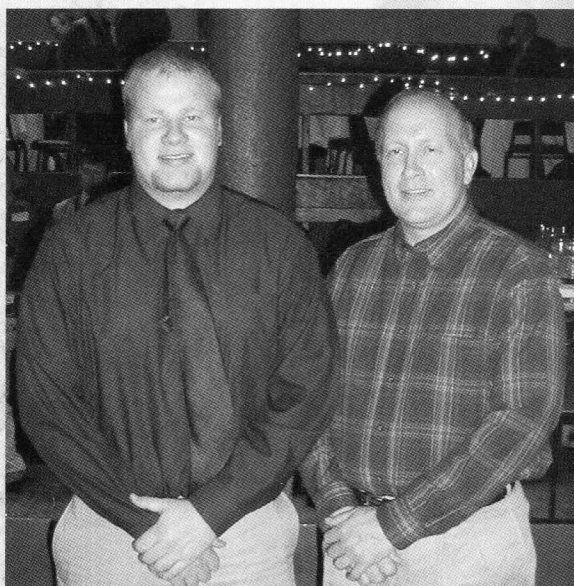
Wow, I made it! It's hard to believe that only four years ago I was moving into a place where I didn't know anybody and had no idea what to expect. I thought seniors were old and graduation was a very distant goal, but now I'm a graduated senior wondering where those four years went.

I came to Iowa State University with an open mind about everything. Oh sure, I've seen Animal House like every other high school student, but I knew that I shouldn't set my expectations according to a movie of this caliber. I didn't know what to expect with classes, dorm life,

or semester finals week. But I soon realized that I wasn't alone...there were over 5,000 students in the same position that I was in! I came from a small town in Iowa that tips the scales at just over 2,000 people, so moving to a community that is the size of Ames was a reality shock in itself. I still remember my first forestry class. Walking into Bessey Hall for the first time with my class schedule in one hand, and a campus map in my other hand, an obvious sign that I was a freshman.

I was a freshman who didn't know anyone else in any of my classes, but that would soon change. As my freshman year went by, I became friends with many of my classmates and began to understand what college life was all about. College isn't just about routinely attending class and getting good grades so that you can land a job when you graduate. Granted, that's a fairly important part of college, but I started to realize that college is an experience that prepares you for life in the real world.

As my college career rapidly accelerated through my sophomore and junior years, lessons in the



*TJ & his father, Kirk at the Forestry Banquet*

classroom, and in life, were thoroughly reinforced. A large part of my sophomore year, and my college memories revolved around fall forestry camp. I went to forestry camp in southern Alabama for three weeks with about 30 students and two professors. Camp was a time when life-long friendships were found and it was a time where we could get a grasp on forestry in a different part of the country. Forestry camp was an extremely valuable tool in helping to round out my forestry education and experience.

I discovered that forestry doesn't just focus on the outdoors and trees. A large

emphasis is placed on teamwork and ethics in the workplace. Forestry isn't just learning to identify trees and how to manage a forest. I realized that college is a four (and sometimes five) year training course for the real world.

My training would come to an end after my senior year, but the largest project of my college tenure was still to come. I had always heard about the forestry practicum course, but I had no idea what to expect. The project was a capstone that required knowledge and use of almost every forestry class that I had taken. It was a lot of work, but the result was well worth the time and effort put forth.

So here I am, after four short years of college wondering where my life will go from here. I may not know what the future holds, but I realize the importance of my past experiences at Iowa State University. I didn't just learn how to manage a forest in forestry, I learned how to manage my career and my life. Majoring in forestry was an amazing experience, and I invite anyone who is interested to take a good look at the forestry department at Iowa State University, you won't be disappointed.

Before I sign off, I would like to extend my thanks to some people who helped make my college experience more valuable. First, the professors who seemed to force upon me a never-ending work load that only now I realize really did help me. My advisor, who seemed to have a solution to every problem that I ran into throughout college. The secretaries in the department office who always had the answers. My friends who were beside me every step of the way. And of course, my parents, who without their guidance and support, none of this would have been possible. Thank you.

Finally, a little advice for new or incoming students: get involved! These two little words can be the most important words you will hear at college. These two little words can help you make friends. These two little words can increase the worth of your resume. But most important, these two little words will help you have more fun!



**T.J. counts the bread after a day of Christmas tree sales.**



**T.J. (right) and Zach Ludwig think it's safe to talk to Jim Clark during a break from chainsaw carving at VEISHA.**